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מכון ויצמן למדע
THE WEIZMANN INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE
REHOVOT · ISRAEL רחובות · ישראל

PROF. I. DOSTROVSKY
Acting President

February 28, 1974

פרופ' י. דוסטרובסקי
נשיא מכון

Prof. Joshua Lederberg
Dept. of Genetics
Stanford University Med. Schl.
Stanford, Calif. 94305
USA

Dear Prof. Lederberg,

Our retreat from the Suez Canal has had only a minor effect on the personnel situation at the Institute. People are beginning to trickle back in small numbers, but so far the effect is hardly felt. I hope that the next few weeks will see an increase in their numbers.

During the war and the period immediately following it the participation in the national effort of those of the Institute who were not called up for service for various reasons was very much on an ad hoc basis and often as a result of individual initiative. In this way groups and individuals helped out in essential industries, on farms, in services and in social work. The tasks fulfilled were mostly outside the normal competence of the staff. They included, for example, fairly routine assembly duties in industry, milking cows and picking flowers for export, delivering mail, teaching in schools, transporting people and helping families of fallen soldiers in various ways. Many of the scientific staff are still taking part in the army's educational and recreational programme (I'm not sure how exactly to classify this activity!) by giving lectures on various scientific subjects to front line troops.

Gradually these activities are being institutionalized and formalized. This is done within the framework of a national policy aimed at a more equitable sharing of the load of the emergency between the part of the nation manning the lines and the part of the nation "back home", in the rear. The Ministry of Education has issued clear guidelines for national service of the Institutions of Higher Learning in Israel. Although these affect primarily the universities with their large student bodies, the Institute will also participate in this programme. In addition, various other formal arrangements of long duration are being finalized.

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These extracurricular activities have been beneficial in more than one way. Not only did the work of our staff provide valuable direct and immediate help but the contact of Institute personnel with parts of society entirely new to them was important to both sides. The fact that scientists came and worked shoulder to shoulder with soldiers, workers, and farmers had a certain morale lifting value. At the same time Institute scientists became directly aware of the problems facing the nation at the present time. An appreciable number of people are still involved in these activities.

Closer home, the continuing manpower shortage requires a new approach to its utilisation. The problem is being tackled on two levels - redistribution of personnel and retraining. The latter point perhaps needs some further explanation. We are trying to create a pool of people who, after proper training, can fill in for various service personnel when they are called up. For example, we aim at training some laboratory technicians and junior scientists in the operation of basic workshop machines and in the maintenance of mechanical and electrical equipment. Up to now, the Institute equipment and facilities have been running well with reduced maintenance because of the good condition in which they entered the war period. But obviously this cannot last and already signs are apparent of incipient breakdown and urgent need of maintenance. It is this situation we are trying to solve by the retraining and reassignment of personnel.

In spite of all these vicissitudes the Institute functions almost normally. The present letter is getting a bit too long to turn now to a description of some important scientific matters. I shall write you again soon a letter devoted entirely to scientific and academic matters.

With best regards,

Sincerely,


I. Dostrovsky